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Elmar Lueth

WALK DON'T WALK

Berlin has been condemned always to become, never to be.

Karl Scheffler, 1910

I dial Berlin Tourist Information. My fingers dance across the phone and when I put the receiver to my ear, I hear the faint buzz of electricity honing in on my destination. Then the signal. Then a woman's voice, friendly and caring. "All our lines are busy right now. Please do not hang up. We will take your call as soon as one of our representatives is available. Thank you." Then the music sets in, the voice of a man and a woman climbing and falling alongside violins and trumpets. I'm not surprised to find myself on hold. Berlin is a busy place these days. I remember the year I had to find an apartment in the city, not too long after the Wall had vanished. Friends told me it might take six months, if I were lucky, or maybe a year, if I weren't. I placed a want ad in "Der Tagesspiegel," and when I told the woman that I hadn't thought of offering a finder's fee, she laughed at me, her high-pitched giggle a mix of cosmopolitan disbelief and pity. "Well, you might as well forget it then," she said, and I felt found out, a man from the provinces learning the ropes of the capital.

"All our lines are busy right now. Please do not hang up. We will take your call as soon as one of our representatives is available. Thank you." This time I just want to visit, walk around, look for the city that boasts to be the workshop of German Unity. I haven't been back for three years. The man and the woman still sing with unflagging enthusiasm. They sing about Berlin, and the tune is easy and smooth, half Sinatra, half Olympic theme song. The words are English, which surprises me at first but then makes sense. Some tourists may feel stranded in a language they don't understand. They might get bored and hang up, which wouldn't do. From a statistical point of view, English has to be the safest bet. And it is safe in another way. After all, this is Berlin, the old and new German capital, where history settles in thick layers, and too much celebration, too much pride, might seem unnerving to some. English, well-lit and democratic, provides assurance. "This is the city of friends,"

the man and the woman sing and then get cut off by the other recording, the one which tells me I haven't been forgotten. Piece by piece the lyrics slide into my receiver, no longer quite fitting together, a collage of happiness and goodwill—"one day they broke down the Wall" and "harmony in our hearts" and "now we are walking hand in hand." The last line I hear before my call goes through is this one:

"The dream can now begin."

The S-Bahn rattles into Friedrichstraße station. On a whim, I decide to get off and take a taxi the rest of the way. It's a warm day, and I'm tired of lugging my bag around. The driver nods when he hears the name of my hotel and pulls out into the traffic. We travel south on Friedrichstraße, then turn east onto Unter den Linden. "What the heck is that?" I say, more to myself than to the driver, but he's glad to have an opening. "You mean the pipes?" he asks, and looks at me in the rearview mirror. "Yes," I answer and stare out the window. All along Unter den Linden, at a height of fifteen feet, pink and blue metal pipes run parallel to the sidewalks. They span intersections and fork off into side streets without an end in sight. They look like something out of a Jules Verne novel, a giant pneumatic mail system that pumps news capsules from one end of the city to the other. "They are water pipes," says the driver, "controlling ground water from the construction at Potsdamer Platz." "Oh," I say and settle back into my seat.

We continue east on Unter den Linden, cross the Schloßbrücke, and drive past the Palast der Republik, the former East German parliament building. The driver finds me again in his rearview mirror. "If you ask me," he says, "there is too much construction going on. Can't believe all this was rotten. It's money, you know." I nod, wondering what part of the city he lives in. He looks fiftyish, gray hair, glasses. He drives without hurry, steady, shifting well before the engine has to strain. "You never know what streets are open. The guys on the radio should simply announce what streets haven't been torn up. Would save a lot of time." I nod again and think of the Berlin map in my backpack. I bought it a couple of days ago, and when I unfolded it to look at the layout of the city's heart, I noticed the fine print near Potsdamer Platz. *Traffic flow may change at any time.* A map maker's final surrender. We circle around Alexander Platz, switch lanes a couple of times, and then pull into the driveway of the hotel. I hand over the fare and get my bag out of the trunk.

“Looks like I’m in luck with the weather,” I say, leaning into the driver’s window. He laughs and shakes his head. “Hey, I wouldn’t mind some rain,” he says, “better for business.” Then he puts the car in gear and slips back into the traffic.

Berlin is situated on the great plain of the North German Flatlands. Its precise geographical location is 52°31'12" N and 13°24'36" E. The city covers an area of 889 square kilometers. It extends 38 km from north to south and 45 km from east to west. The city lies between 34 and 60 meters above sea-level. The highest elevations are the Teufelsberg in the Grunewald and the Müggelberge near Köpenick, which are 115 meter-high mounds of wartime rubble. The climate is continental and is also influenced by Atlantic seawinds. Berlin is set in a landscape of forests and woods which also cover 24% of the city’s surface. A further 6.7% of the land is used for agriculture and there are 197 km of navigable waterways in the city.*

From where I stand on the roof of the INFO-BOX, I can see all of Potsdamer Platz. This used to be Europe’s busiest intersection, an anthill of cars, trucks, trams, carriages, bicycles, and pedestrians. In 1924, somewhere in front of me, stood Germany’s first traffic light. Cafés. Hotels. The clattering of hooves. Car horns. Newspaper boys shouting headlines. After the war—a pocket of silence. The slow choreography of black market dealers and hungry customers. Then, the growing solidity of sector lines, a fissure running through Potsdamer Platz that, on August 13, 1961, becomes the Wall, cutting the city. Now, there is so much movement I don’t know which way to look: right in front of me a giant excavator floats in the middle of a lake. (This must be the ground water, I think.) Every two minutes or so, the excavator’s shovel plunges into the water, sinks for several seconds, then comes up again, spewing muddy fountains as it breaks the surface and goes airborne. The excavator swivels, slowly and deliberately, until the shovel hangs above a barge already half-full.

* Once, on a blustery fall day, I rode my bicycle to the top of the Teufelsberg. It was a good day for flying kites, and all around me I could see children and adults looking up into the sky, pointing at the different shapes and colors above. Every now and then two kites would get entangled in midair, and their owners would have to dance around each other to undo the knot, laughing the whole time. Two boys carried remote controls slung around their necks. I followed their gazes until I discovered two gliders traveling lazy circles high above the mound. There was also a group of young men with parachutes—yellow and purple mushrooms they would raise above their heads by running into the wind and then leaping off the edge, gliding down at the slightest angle, almost weightless.

The shovel opens and the mud rains into the barge, rocking it into a sideway dance. When the barge leaves, the construction site looks like a harbor.

I let my eyes travel upward to study the cranes, the men in their tiny control boxes. They are too far away to be real. Like weather vanes caught in a complicated wind, the cranes turn in all directions, and yet they never touch. I begin to count. Twice I have to start over because the cranes crowd each other into invisibility, mechanical knots that tighten and fall apart above the horizon. I count to fifty-two, then let my eyes come down again. Cement trucks weave their way past stacks of wood and metal, each truck painted in black and white stripes. From a distance, they look like zebras whose torsos have come unhinged. A bulldozer rounds up a small mountain of ground, sending up dark smoke each time the engine climbs into another gear. When it backs up, the warning signal cuts through the air and mixes with the other sounds: the insistent staccato of jackhammers. The high whine of electrical saws. The splashing of water. A random symphony of drum beats rolling across metal, wood, cement, and ground.

“Excuse me.” There is a slight tap on my shoulder. I turn around and look at a woman holding a camera. “Would you mind taking a picture of me and my husband over here?” I look over at the husband. He reassures me with a smile. “Sure,” I say and take the camera. “Everything’s automatic,” the woman says, putting her arm around her husband. “Just press the button.” I look through the viewfinder. The couple is smiling. A bit of wind catches the woman’s blue dress, and she bends over to straighten it. Then her hand moves up to her hair, tucking away a few loose strands. The husband hasn’t moved. “Okay,” I say, and their smiles travel ahead in time, trying to catch up with the photograph already taken in their minds. I don’t press the button right away. I’m waiting for some of the cranes to move into the picture. When they finally do, I’m ready.

Berlin will soon have a beating heart again. The German capital’s new urban center is rising in Potsdamer Platz. The project’s dimensions are extraordinary: 18,000 people will live and work here; 100,000 visitors, guests and customers will be expected daily.

Berlin’s dead heart will start to beat again as these few years pass, recreated as a pulsating, bubbling center for the 21st century. A myth is being reconstructed here, a new piece of metropolis is coming into being as an experiment—an experiment without historical precedent. Something that normally takes decades or centuries to evolve is

being created here in only a few years . . .

The fall of the Wall was a victory for mankind. However, as terrible as it may sound, at the same time Berlin lost one of its main tourist attractions.

A new concept has been born in Berlin: construction site tourism.

Auguststraße. I'm looking for number 75, but I can't find it. Most of the houses on this street haven't been renovated, and the numbers aren't easily legible. The five-story-high facades run through all shades of gray, the crumbling balconies struggle with gravity. I pass a small, makeshift art gallery and decide to ask the two men sitting in front of it. They barely look up, then point to an entrance on their left. As I enter, a young woman with a baby carriage is getting ready to leave. "Excuse me, is this number 75?" I ask. "Yes," she says, smiling. I look around for mailboxes or doorbells, something to help me find the apartment I want. Nothing. The woman is bending over the carriage, straightening the blanket. "Would you happen to know where Markus Heckhausen lives?" She looks up and thinks for a moment. "I'm afraid I don't," she says and unlocks the brakes of the carriage. "You may have heard of him," I tell her, "he is a designer. He takes East German pedestrian lights and turns them into indoor lamps." She looks at me again and shakes her head. I can tell she has begun to doubt my sense of reality. "Sorry, I really don't know," she says and pushes past me.

The entrance hall of the house doesn't have any stairs. There is only one apartment door without a name, but I don't try it. I seem to remember that Markus Heckhausen talked in our phone conversation about living on the second floor. I cut through the hall and enter the courtyard, a funnel of windows and more gray walls. A door on the opposite side leads to the stairs, and I begin to climb. The banister is made from wood, worn dark and soft by a century of hands. The walls of the stairwell are pale green. Most of the paint has cracked and bends away from the moisture underneath. In the dim light, the flakes of paint look like butterflies, resting, waiting to break into a confusion of wings. Since the house is in such poor repair, the question of ownership must still be pending. Nobody will invest until there is certainty in this matter. But afterwards the change will be swift, triggering a procession of painters, carpenters, brick masons, plumbers, electricians, and whoever else knows the right craft. I have seen it happen in other eastern neighborhoods, a

house surrounded by a metal corset, shedding years in a matter of weeks.

Markus Heckhausen does live on the second floor. I ring the bell and a young man with tiny, round glasses opens the door. He wears a loose-fitting white sweater. His black pants are splattered with paint. "Hello," he says, "come on in." The apartment has two rooms, and the lamps are everywhere. Five or six of them sit on the floor, their white electrical cords twisting around each other like pasta. Pictures of the lamps have been taped to a large computer, which hums evenly in a pile of newspaper clippings and press releases. A box of light bulbs and a box of sockets share the sofa under a print by Monet.

"You see," Markus Heckhausen says, "I didn't like the idea of East German pedestrian lights being replaced by western ones without reason. So I decided to preserve them." He picks up one of the lamps and puts it into my hands. I can easily tell the difference between the East German lights and the West German ones I grew up with. Both use the picture of a man to tell pedestrians whether to walk or not, but the two men seem to belong to separate clans. "I think the East German man looks more dynamic, more life-like than the western man," Markus Heckhausen says. "He deserves to survive." I study the shape of the pedestrian-light-man in front of me. He is red (don't walk), short, and stocky, spreading his arms in perfect symmetry. He also wears a hat (western man doesn't), a kind of fedora, which gives him the appearance of respectable middle-age. He looks like the kind of man who has his finances in order and likes to feed pigeons in the park. His green counterpart, who I spot on the floor, also wears a hat. Like western man, he is turned sideways, walking, but his arms seem to swing with more determination and energy. "Yes," I say, "he is less abstract."

The red lamp I hold in my hands has a serrated steel rim with the English words "Don't stop me now!" cut into it. The rim around the green lamp reads: "Keep on walking" Markus Heckhausen takes the lamp from me and explains where he had to file off some sharp edges to be in line with German safety regulations. "I also had to use some superglue," he says, "keeps the socket from spinning in the frame." He puts the lamp down and hands me a press release: *The original East German pedestrian-light-man now gives his first civilian performance—as "keep on walking" in green and as "don't stop me now" in red. Since his "colleagues" are threatened with complete replacement by standardized western men, the pedestrian-light-lamp assures that a piece of eastern culture will sur-*

vive in a humorous and decorative manner. After running (or standing) in the eastern parts of the country for more than thirty years, the pedestrian-light-man deserves an honorable departure and shouldn't just disappear: and that is why he now receives an imaginary victory wreath in the shape of a serrated steel rim. . . . Whoever would like to own a pedestrian-light-man can order him for 198 marks at: Heckhausen Design, Auguststraße 75, 10117 Berlin (Mitte), Tel/Fax (030) 28 28 78 0 Markus Heckhausen studied product design at the Polytechnic Institute in Pforzheim (here I learn that he is from the West). A year ago he started his own business in Berlin. And in the inspiring atmosphere of a metropolis under construction the pedestrian-light-lamp has become his first product.

"Did you know that they are planning a completely new pedestrian-light-man?" Markus Heckhausen asks. I shake my head. "Yes, and he's going to be even more abstract than the western one." He walks over to a table by the window where the lamp parts have grown into a small pyramid. "I have one of these guys around here somewhere." He searches the pile, pulling it apart like a lump of stubborn seaweed. "Ah, here he is," he says and holds up a black plastic cover with the shape of a man carved into it. I can see what he means. This man isn't even in one piece anymore—head, torso, arms, and legs all float next to each other as if waiting for their chance to leave. "I don't like it," Markus Heckhausen says, speaking with a designer's confidence in matters of form. While he holds up the new man, I study his face and am struck by how tired he looks, his eyes disappearing behind the small glasses, the shadow of a beard across his cheeks. So far, he has put together a hundred lamps in his apartment, some fifty have been sold—not enough to pay the bills, he says. He works a couple of other jobs and eats at the university cafeteria. His car, which he bought a couple of weeks ago, is an eastern two-cycle Trabant.

Take a riksha through Berlin: an architectural excursion in a real Chinese riksha. From the Middle Ages to Prussia, from the Cold War into the next century. You will see, among other things, Unter den Linden, Pariser Platz, Potsdamer Platz, and Check-point Charlie.

The INFO-BOX at Potsdamer Platz cost ten million marks. On a good day it informs up to ten thousand visitors. This is my third trip to the box. Here all the investors explain what they are up to, what buildings they will move into, what architects they have hired to push their dreams into three dimensions.

The box looks funny. It is bright red and sits on steel stilts eight meters above the ground. The stilts disappear into the box at different angles, which, from a distance, makes the structure look like a staggering beetle. To get into the box one has to get under the box, where a broad flight of steel stairs leads up to the first floor. Climbing the stairs, even for the third time, I have the feeling of boarding a ship, and I look at the people around me to decide whether they would make good traveling companions. Later, after reading the INFO-BOX catalog, I will find out that I'm not the first one to think this. I will also receive help with my metaphor. *The INFO-BOX is like a large spaceship in the middle of all the building activity. And as is only right and proper for a spaceship of this kind it has a crew. Despite all the technology, people are still needed to welcome visitors and make sure they enjoy themselves.*

Some of the crew members are on duty behind the information desk on the first floor. Two or three others are busy leading small groups through the exhibit. But mostly the visitors explore on their own. We push each other past flow charts, cluster around display cases, touch computer screens, and click mouses. There is plenty of noise inside the box. The clatter of voices mixes with recordings that switch back and forth between music and sonorous explanations of building phases and technological challenges. Underneath the voices is the murmur of feet, thousands of them, shuffling, tapping, scraping from one floor to another. On my last two visits I learned that Potsdamer Platz is the largest inner-city building site in Europe. I also learned that it is a city in itself. It has its own road and rail system. It has its own ground water lake. It has its own houses—tiny, yellow boxes stacked like bricks, where men fall into what must be deep, motionless slumber.

Today I spend most of my time in front of a large screen. It explains the plans for putting the city's rail system back together, for making it meet the demands of the next millennium. *Berlin's new, strong heart will be beating in the Central Area in a few years. Transport systems that will do justice to the demands of a major modern city that is additionally becoming the East-West hub at the center of Europe are being built at the same time as the innovative economic center of the German capital is growing up.* Right now, the screen shows a computer simulation of Lehrter Bahnhof, a large station which should be finished some time after the year 2000. We hover about two hundred meters above the station, admiring its massive glass roof. A man's voice tells us that some 110,000 passenger changes will take place in Lehrter Bahnhof each day. Then our perspective begins to shift. Slowly, we tip forward and begin to gather speed. We are

falling towards the glass roof. For a second or two I worry, still trapped inside of real space and gravity. But when we hit the roof it is already gone, and we now fly underneath it, sweeping above the heads of future travelers and high speed trains waiting to leave.

*Come to Berlin! The capital will never again be what it is today. Feel how the city, how its center changes daily. Take a look today at the city of tomorrow.**

Each time a train passes overhead, a deep rumble travels through the brick walls, and I stop eating my soup. Even after three hours of sitting in this restaurant, I'm not used to this string of ten-second earthquakes that rattle the lamp above my head and make my coffee cup dance on its saucer. I worry that the walls are going to give. They were built in 1882, part of a five-mile viaduct running through Berlin's center from east to west, and look, as far as I can tell, in need of repair. It wasn't my idea to come here. Cornelia suggested the place, which she remembers from her student days in East Berlin. She is drinking her third cup of tea right now, carefully blowing cold air over it before she takes a sip. We used to work together in the Amerika Haus in Charlottenburg. I worked upstairs in the English teaching section, and she worked downstairs in the library. She is still there, shelving books, helping people with microfilms, answering questions with professional patience. "If I could, I would move away from here," she says and takes another sip from her tea. "Rather sooner than later." She has brought along a folder full of newspaper clippings, articles about the city that she has carefully dated and puts in front of me like pieces of evidence. There are stories about old restaurants and stores closing down. Stories about pay cuts and rent increases. Stories about name changes for streets and squares (most of them in the east). Stories about the Palast der Republik, whether it should be torn down or left standing, whether it is really full of asbestos, whether its memory is worth anything at all. "I used to read a lot of books," Cornelia says, "but now I mostly read papers." She closes the folder and pushes it towards me. "You can take a look at these, but I would like them back."

I thank her and slide the folder into my backpack. I think about this: a librarian who no longer reads books. She must have become impatient with them—slow worlds of words which move at a glacial pace compared to the

* I do. This is what I notice: in the Berlin of the future, rising inside the memory of hard drives, the sun is always shining.

city around her. An hour ago, she told me how she used to organize readings for a library. The readings were always well-attended, and the writers sometimes brought texts which hadn't officially been cleared, hoping to try out uncensored words on an audience that understood the privilege. She never missed any of these readings. It would have been foolish to let them happen without her being there, she said. She needed to know firsthand what was and wasn't read. Someone might have made accusations after the reading, claiming that the words had drifted beyond party truths. She wanted to be prepared for that. And, of course, she also wanted to hear the words in the first place, how they might stray from the mapped-out path and cut into the underbrush. She misses words that can mean with such clarity.

Another train passes overhead, and I shoot another glance at the brick walls. My coffee cup dances on its saucer. "We're not the same," says Cornelia, "we read, talk, and see differently." She says this with so much conviction that I nod before I know whether I agree. "People from the West always think we don't know what's going on. But they're wrong. We had to be good at reading people, trying to figure out whether they could be trusted or not. It's a skill we had to develop." I take a sip from my coffee. I wonder how I have been read for the past three hours. Cornelia orders another cup of tea. "Westerners are so worried about how they come across. It's like being on stage the whole time. You pick whatever act promises the biggest return." She says that it took her a while to figure this out. Years ago, in East Berlin, she saw an American diplomat open a book exhibit at the U.S. embassy. It was a rare occasion. She remembers the room being full of tension, everyone knew that coming to the exhibit was a kind of trespassing that wouldn't go unnoticed. But the American diplomat seemed not to care; he spoke eloquently and moved around the room with sureness, even grace. He didn't pay attention to the traces of fear and hesitation. He invited everyone to take a look at the books as if it were the most natural of choices. "I admired that man," Cornelia says, "I had never seen anyone act that way. Everything he did looked filled with purpose. He seemed, well . . . he seemed complete—you know, a new kind of man." I listen for a hint of cynicism behind her last words, but there is none. Another train rumbles overhead. "Anyway," she continues, "that was a long time ago. Now I know that this man was nothing special."

When we finally leave the restaurant, it is dark outside. Cornelia offers to give me a ride to the next U-Bahn station. Her car is parked up the street, a

blue Opel Corsa she bought a couple of years ago. It is a small car, the kind that comes in handy in a large city. She tells me that she took some extra driving lessons before she went to the dealer. "To get used to the traffic," she says. She also opted for an automatic transmission. Her friends and family can't get used to the idea of an automatic transmission. They tell her a real car has to be a stick shift, but she has decided to ignore them. She likes not having to worry about a clutch, especially with all the construction going on around the city. When she opens the door for me and I slide into the seat, I notice that the Opel still smells new. There is no clutter at all inside, neither in front nor back. Cornelia fastens her seat belt, turns the key, and the engine springs to life, a distant purr from behind the well-lit dashboard. She puts the car into drive and turns the steering wheel. She checks the side view mirror, sees no car coming, and steps on the accelerator. Nothing happens. We look at each other, then down at the hand brake. Cornelia giggles as she unlocks it. "You know," she says, her face turned towards the roof, "sometimes I sit in this car and I think it's all just like the movies . . . just like the movies."

Sony is convinced that this exciting city will once again play an important role and for that reason has decided to relocate its European headquarters to the German capital. The ultramodern office building will make a significant contribution to Sony's corporate image in the 21st Century.

On Friedrichstraße, near the new Galeries Lafayette, a tall and slender girl makes her way through the crowd. She carries a sign above her head, which makes her look even taller. This is what the sign says: *Help us greet Arnold Schwarzenegger at 5:30 p.m. on Mohrenstraße*. I check my map. Mohrenstraße is just a block away, a side street running from east to west. Right now, it is 4:45 p.m. When I get to Mohrenstraße, some forty or fifty people are already waiting outside the new Planet Hollywood restaurant. A small stage has been set up in front of the entrance, framed by two palm trees. The space for the press has been carefully roped off, including a small platform for the photographers and cameramen. I find a place near the back of the crowd, where I climb on top of a fence and watch.

The press section slowly begins to fill. Two cameramen are having an argument about who was there first to claim one of the better spots. Sound systems get checked. At the entrance gate to the press section, two security guards are on duty. They have crew cuts and wear sunglasses. A few Planet

Hollywood officials, marked by badges, walk back and forth in front of the stage. One is a young woman dressed in a dark blue suit and platform shoes. She wears an intercom system, and each time she receives a message from somewhere, she stops and listens, then continues to walk. A man in his mid-thirties seems to be the supervisor. He wears a loose-fitting gray flannel suit, the kind that almost looks baggy but is really cut with maverick elegance. His blond hair is neatly parted on the left, and his horn-rims lend an air of distinction. The briefcase he carries is old and worn, highlighting the elegant cut of his suit. More and more reporters arrive in front of the stage, among them the well-known news anchor of a breakfast show. People in the crowd begin to point their fingers and whisper.

All of this has been accompanied by dance music flowing from two large speakers. A video screen has been showing movie clips from parties at other Planet Hollywoods. Berlin, I learn, is the 36th location worldwide. *Planet Hollywood orbits the globe*. At 5:10 p.m. another young woman with a badge climbs onto the stage. Our attention shifts towards her. "I've just received word," she says, "that Arnold is still in the air. But he'll be with us soon." A few shouts and whistles. "And while I'm up here, why don't we practice our welcome for Arnold. As you know, he's an action star. He likes action. I'm sure he wouldn't like a reserved German welcome." More whistles and shouts. "Okay, let's give it a try. I'll count to three, and then we'll all shout 'Arnold.'" She pauses for a moment. "All right, here we go—one, two, three, Arnold." A handful of shouts go up from the crowd. "Is that the best you can do?" the young woman asks. "Come on. Let's hear it for Arnold." Again she begins to count, and again the crowd fails to ignite. "Well, we'll just have to try this again later," she says and walks off the stage.

At 5:30 p.m. the young woman is back. Arnold is still in the air, she tells us. It's going to be 6:00 pm before he arrives. She is still worried about the welcome for Arnold and tries once more to warm up the crowd. This time she picks a different chant—"one, two, three, hasta la vista, baby"—and the crowd responds with a little more enthusiasm. At 6:00 p.m. the Planet Hollywood sign on stage collapses and tumbles backwards. For a moment, everyone falls silent. We think this is the sign of his arrival, a special effect, but then the support staff races onto the stage and tries to put the sign back up. We realize this isn't part of a plan. At 6:15 p.m. the young woman climbs back on stage. "His plane has landed," she says with a broad smile. "But before he gets here maybe you can help us out. Some of the photographers

and cameramen need to leave for other appointments, and they need to have some pictures to take with them. Would you mind applauding as if Arnold had already arrived? Come on, how about it?" Three or four photographers and cameramen get ready for the shot. "One, two, three—go." The crowd gives a mild, uncertain cheer. "A little louder, people, a little louder." The crowd begins to think this is funny. It cheers a little louder. "Just a bit more. I know you can do this." The crowd erupts in front of an empty stage.

Arnold Schwarzenegger arrives at 6:45 p.m. He is not as tall as I had expected, but everything else looks right: the dark hair, combed straight back; the bushy eyebrows; the massive jaw line above sloping shoulders. He is carrying a large gun, a prop from his latest movie "Eraser." "This is a Rail Gun," he says, "it has saved my life many times." He speaks German with two accents, one Austrian, the other American. The young woman with the badge is standing next to him, holding a microphone. "Does this kind of gun already exist in reality?" she asks. Arnold Schwarzenegger shakes his head. "No, not yet, but they're working on it." Then he nestles the gun against his body, as if readying himself for enemy fire, and smiles at the press. "It was important to me to open the new Planet Hollywood here in the heart of the new Berlin," he says, and smiles. A little later, he thanks us all for coming out. "Without fans, without the press, there would be no Schwarzenegger." The young woman is impressed with his humility. "Is that an American gesture," she asks, "or is that really Arnold speaking?" He smiles at her. "That's really Arnold."

A lot of people ask: where stood the Wall? There are just a few traces left because the Wall disappears more and more throughout the city and in people's consciousness. This walking tour begins at Checkpoint Charlie and follows the path of the Wall to Potsdamer Platz and on to Brandenburg Gate. This tour will not only search for left-over pieces of the Wall and deliver facts, it will also ask questions of the past and the future.[†]

The visiting platform on top of the INFO-BOX is open well into the night. I arrive around nine, and take my place in the small line that has formed in

* *Eraser*—in order to give you a future, he must take away your past.

† Inside Cornelia's folder, I find a newspaper article dated August 5, 1996: *But one legacy does bother the Federal Minister for Construction Töpfer significantly, as he points out on the stairs. "This East German smell!" It seems impossible to get rid of it. "We have already exchanged some of the carpets, but it doesn't help. The smell must sit inside the walls," complains Töpfer. "I'm usually not like this. But you can imagine that sitting in this smell all day long does dampen one's mood."*

front of the gate. There is a turnstile which feeds us one by one to the flight of stairs leading to the roof. The stairs are metal and ring with the sound of our footsteps as we climb. At night, the view from the roof bears no resemblance to what I've seen during the day. All motion has died away—the cranes are frozen at random angles; the dirt roads lie abandoned, day-old diaries of tire tracks; the ground water lake has flattened out into a silver sheet. There is enough artificial light to see the full size of the site—a valley dotted with backhoes, trucks, generators, water pipes, and the beginnings of new buildings. But the light is uncertain. It leaves enough shadows to blur lines and take away depth, playing tricks with the imagination. Without much effort I can see a change coming over the site.

The new foundations now begin to look old, the ruins of buildings from an earlier age. Now, the purpose isn't construction but excavation, archeology on a grand scale, and the silence in front of me deepens, filling with the slow pace of looking backward. The trucks and backhoes also get caught up in this change. Their oversized wheels and shovels fall out of time and slip beyond their mechanical functions. They are no longer tools but finds themselves, impressive skeletons painstakingly uncovered, their thickness and curvature a matter of curiosity and speculation. The cable drums are deep-sea riddles left by a long-ago ocean, the barges are the hollow carapaces of giant turtles. The site has now become a counterpoint to the city, a passageway into geological time around which the city buzzes like a wound-up toy.

Does your office sometimes remind you of Potsdamer Platz? All of Berlin is a construction site. Your office too? Why don't you talk with Minolta. Our copiers are constructed in a way that requires only a handful of service visits throughout the year. And when our technician comes, he is gone again in no time: our modular design ensures that everything is taken care of at once.

What has been found underneath Potsdamer Platz:

- Five white porcelain cups
- A Löwenbräu tankard
- Wine glasses
- A Schultheiss beer barrel
- Brown chemists' jars
- An advertisement for a detective agency
- A metal plate with instructions: "First turn on the gas-tap and light all the pilot lights, then cooking can begin."

- Old newspapers
- A 1938 book on the “ABC of Dental Care”
- An octagonal mocha cup
- The remains of a classical column
- A larger-than-life-size head of Apollo

Also:

- Half a multiple rocket launcher
- Bits of grenades and guns
- Melted window glass
- A young soldier’s skull protected by a helmet

Whatever you are wanting to arrange, the Potsdamer Platz building site is an extraordinary venue for meetings, lunches, parties or weddings.

Schönhauser Allee 23-25. On my way north into Prenzlauer Berg, I almost walk right by it. The entrance is a small metal gate under a brick arch. Once I have entered and stand on the other side of the gate, the traffic noise on Schönhauser Allee seems to come from a great distance. The guard house is on the right, a tiny structure with small windows. A sign by the door lists opening hours and requests that male visitors enter the cemetery with a head cover. The door to the guard house is open, but nobody is sitting at the desk. I knock and wait. A stereo system sits on a shelf behind the desk, a portable TV has found a place on the window sill. After a minute I knock again, and now I can hear a faint rumble from behind a second door at the back of the room. The groundskeeper seems slightly annoyed by my interruption of whatever he was doing, and I think that not many people must now find their way to this place. I ask for a head cover, and he hands me a blue yarmulke, something I have never worn before and which heightens my sense of being a visitor, of moving among a set of laws I don’t know.

The Jewish cemetery on Schönhauser Allee opened in 1827. At that time, my guidebook points out, it lay outside the city limits, which I find hard to believe in light of the four-story apartment buildings that now stand nearby. The cemetery closed in 1880, but a small number of funerals continued into the 1970s. It is difficult to judge the size of the cemetery because of the dense rows of trees. Their leaves connect and form a kind of roof under which the light is sparse and cool, lining the late morning with a hint of dusk. A thick

carpet of ivy covers the ground, reaching across gravestones and climbing tree trunks all the way into the branches. The gravestones stand in tight rows, many of them leaning at angles, many tipped over all the way. Snails travel the stones like large dew drops. I walk deeper into the cemetery and begin to read inscriptions. They are in German and Hebrew. The dates carved into the weathered stones move back and forth between the Jewish and the Christian calendar, rising and falling through the millennia. I turn left and come to the northern wall of the cemetery. Here the graves are larger, more opulent, but they are just as weathered and unkempt. Some of the inscriptions have almost disappeared, leaving an alphabet of broken lines. Behind the wall, not more than a few yards removed, one of the four-story apartment buildings rises up. I wonder about the view one would have from the third- or fourth-floor living room windows. Would one be more likely to look out during the summer, when the trees are a solid cover of green? Or would the seasons make no difference?

I follow the northern wall for a while and then cut back towards the center. A white shimmer appears between the trees that turns out to be a tarp stretched above a large grave. An electric lamp has been fastened underneath the tarp, flooding the gravestone with intense, almost tangible light. A young man wearing a baseball cap hunches over the stone, working at a steady pace. He is surrounded by tools; brushes, scrapers, plastic bottles, and rugs lie scattered at his feet; an air compressor sits on the ground behind him. The stone marks a family grave. It has seven arches cut into it, each framing a name and dates. One of the names is *Max Liebermann (1847-1935)*—the Berlin painter who began his career with a simple picture of women plucking geese. In 1933, when his fame had made him honorary president of the Prussian Academy of the Arts, he had to surrender his office under increasing political pressure.* I can tell without difficulty where the work on the stone has already been finished. It is the fourth arch from the right that lifts away from the others, no longer a sooty gray, but white like chalk or limestone. I try to imagine what the stone will look like when all the work is done. It will likely be visible from a distance, even on an overcast day and underneath the shadow of the trees.

* Max Liebermann and his family lived just north of Potsdamer Platz.

Dear Visitor!

We would be pleased if you could write down your personal vision on this sheet of paper. Afterwards you can attach it to our "Vision-Line" in front of the small assembly room. We will publish the results in "Der Tagesspiegel."

- 1. The intellectual and emotional state of the republic.*
- 2. What virtues do the Germans have to cultivate?*
- 3. What values does the country need?*
- 4. Your dreams and hopes for Germany.*
- 5. The largest danger at the present time?*
- 6. What has to be done most urgently?*
- 7. Germany's role in Europe and in the world.*

When I meet Mehmet Kalin, he is cleaning the tires of his bicycle. He is standing in front of a small shack whose architecture must violate every city code on the books. I found the shack yesterday, walking west on Köpenicker Straße, looking for the place where the Wall used to cut the street in half. There isn't much left to see, no slabs of concrete or watchtower, just a stretch of grass running down a side street. The shack has been built right next to the grass, including a fenced-in garden that sprawls across the former border, filled with regular rows of cabbage. At first sight, the shack looks like a pile of junk without a single straight line. Boards, rafters, car hoods, sheets of tin, bricks, and plastic tarps have been pushed together into the faint echo of a house. The fence around the garden shows the same workmanship—wire mesh, rusted garden gates, boards, and mattress springs encircle the cabbage.

I walk up to Mehmet Kalin and introduce myself. I tell him that I discovered the shack yesterday, and that I'm curious to find out what it is doing here. He doesn't seem to mind my question. He asks me to wait a moment while he locks away the bicycle, and then suggests we talk inside the shack where we can sit down. The door is low and narrow, and I have to bend my head to be able to slip inside. Instead of a room, I now find myself in a kind of passageway that leads past a small enclosure on the right (in the half-light I can see old suitcases, a pile of coats, an overturned oven, a guitar without strings) and an open vista of the garden on the left. We are walking on a set of planks which bounce with every step, keeping us a few inches above the cabbage. Then comes a sharp 180 degree turn and a short flight of stairs. Here the walls move in close enough to make us turn sideways as we begin to climb. At the top of the stairs, we turn left and enter a low, square room full

of daylight that comes in through the plastic tarp roof. Mehmet Kalin offers me an old desk chair, while he sits down on a stool next to a wood stove. There are no other chairs, but the floor has been covered with blankets, sheepskins, and pieces of Styrofoam. A scratched slice of mirror hangs on the back wall, framed by two hand saws.

"My father started this garden," Mehmet Kalin says. "He stopped working in 1985, and he didn't know what to do with his time. He had worked construction . . . hard work, you know, and going to the Mosque to pray wasn't enough to fill his days." His voice is soft as he talks about his father, his German woven around a Turkish accent. But I can also hear Berlin in his sentences, hard-nosed consonants that tell of the years he has spent in the city. His father arrived in Germany in 1964 to find work. Back then, Mehmet Kalin was two years old, which means he has lived in this country for 32 years, much longer than I have. I want to know whether anybody complained about the garden when it started up. Could an old Turkish man simply walk up to the Wall and start planting vegetables? Mehmet Kalin laughs quietly. "Oh yes, the police told my father several times to stop, but he never did. Once a policeman tried to keep my father from getting water from a public pipeline not far from here. They wrestled over the valve until it burst open by accident, and sprayed them until they were soaked." We both laugh. I imagine Mehmet Kalin's father and the police officer embracing in a half-serious struggle, two unlikely dancers, pushing each other until the water has cooled them off.

"There was one other time," Mehmet Kalin says. "My father was in the garden and heard a voice behind him. He turned around and saw three East German soldiers looking over the Wall. They must have used ladders or something. They told my father that his garden couldn't be here. They told him it was a security risk." I imagine this too: three East German soldiers, cut off above the waist, leaning into West Germany, concerned about vegetables. "What happened?" I ask. "Did they do anything?" Mehmet Kalin shakes his head. "No, nothing happened. My father just kept gardening."

A light rain has begun to fall and taps the plastic roof. Mehmet Kalin plays with the drawstring of his coat, twirling it around his index finger, a small propeller that shrinks and grows. I can hear footsteps coming up the stairs, and a moment later an old Turkish woman enters the room. She wears a traditional head scarf and a black coat buttoned all the way to the top. Mehmet Kalin addresses her in Turkish, and she bends down to the stove, filling it

with wood and paper. After she has lit the stove, she pushes together a couple of sheepskins and settles on the floor. A piece of Styrofoam serves her as a backrest. I ask Mehmet Kalin what he does for a living, and he tells me that he is a bricklayer, working construction like his father. He has worked all over the city, even, for a little while, at Potsdamer Platz. "I took my whole family to see Potsdamer Platz," he says. "We took pictures. Potsdamer Platz is very good, you know, very good for Germany's future." I want to know whether he still thinks about going back to Turkey some day. He isn't sure. His children speak German now, and for the most part he likes it here. "Only right after the changes," he adds, "when the Wall came down, it was a difficult time. With all the violence that happened, I was worried for my children. I thought all the time, what if someone tries to hurt them on their way to school. If someone hurts me, I can fight, you know. Then I will die or he. But my children can't do that. Back then, I was very worried."

The rain falls harder now, collecting in small puddles on top of the tarp. The old woman speaks a few Turkish words, and Mehmet Kalin shakes his head; he looks out the window into the garden where the cabbage leaves dip up and down in rhythm with the drops. "You know," he says, "there is a map of this part of the city. I've seen it. And my father's garden is on it. It says *small Turkish garden*, right there on the map."

Central Berlin lies in an ice-age glacial valley with a range of deposits; this means that building in Berlin is by no means straightforward.

I didn't expect to find divers at the construction site. They work on a square pontoon, a crew of three, one of whom descends into the brownish water, while the other two stand watch and feed the braided oxygen and radio lines after him. The water is too dirty for the diver to see once his lead weights have pulled him to a depth of twenty meters. Down at the bottom, his work is a mix of touch and spatial memory. Like a blind man, he fingers the cement blocks that will soon carry a building. I wonder what he can hear down there besides the radio voice channeled into the helmet. Maybe the engine noise from above travels this far. Maybe he is surrounded by perfect silence which sometimes makes him forget where he is, leaving the world above as a task for his imagination.

When the diver comes back to the surface, gravity catches up with him, and he climbs onto the pontoon with the awkward hobble of a seal gaining land. His two partners are there to help him, lifting him to his feet and

keeping an eye on the tangle of hoses. They are dressed casually, wearing t-shirts, jeans, and fatigues. First they unscrew the diver's helmet, then they take off his lead weights. They chat and joke with each other as the diver peels himself out of his suit. They don't look like construction specialists, men who have to worry about keeping schedules and measure their tasks in inches. Set off by themselves, floating on a pontoon scattered with diving suits, oxygen tanks, ropes, cables, buckets, they look like a band of adventurers, men who dive for the stuff of stories—gold, silver, the hidden secrets of sunken ships . . .

*magnificent relics from the emperor's era to be integrated into the new building
gleaming with black granite
the way to a golden future
unimaginable quality
a striking sign
spectacular
legendary
colossal*

At the south end of Friedrichstraße, not far from the old Checkpoint Charlie, I finally decide to put my hand against one of the pink and blue waterlines. I want to know whether I can feel the rush of water on the inside or maybe the faint buzz of a pump working. The metal pipe is solid and cool and still. It looks like an elaborate, mile-long statue. A soccer ball flies up from behind the next house corner, arches over the pipe a few yards in front of me, and bounces into the middle of the street. A second later, a boy comes chasing after the ball. He checks for traffic with a quick turn of his head, runs out into the street, snatches the ball, and is gone again. When I reach the house corner, I find a small playground wedged between the four-story buildings. The boy and a friend are kicking the ball back and forth across a couple of benches. They are concentrating hard, keeping their eyes on the ball, their bodies in constant motion. They are keeping score, and right now have no attention left for anything else.

I watch them for a couple of minutes and listen as the score climbs through the rapid pulse of their breathing. Only when the ball bounces off into some bushes and stops the game do they notice me. "Hi," I say, "what are you playing?" The taller of the two boys has picked up the ball and now holds it

casually at his side. "It's just something we made up," he says, "kind of a mix between tennis and soccer." He wears thin wire-rim glasses and the first shadow of a beard curves above his upper lip. His name is Christoph. His friend, Jan, is a full head shorter, no trace of a beard. "We aren't really supposed to be here," Christoph says, "our school doesn't like it when we sneak away during breaks." Both Christoph and Jan grew up not far from here, in the old heart of the city. I ask what they remember of East Germany. They shrug their shoulders at the same time. "Not much," Jan says, "guess I remember the pioneer meetings at school in the morning. We had to wear a red scarf and stuff. Some of it was fun."

Jan was nine when the Wall came down, Christoph was ten. "Man, you wouldn't believe how many people showed up at our apartment that night," Christoph says. "Our place was packed with friends and family, everyone talking at once." The first thing Christoph did after that night was to go over into West Berlin and buy a remote control buggy. "Pretty strange if you think about it," he says, "but I only had this plastic tank to play with. It had a battery cable, and all you could do was run after it—that thing bored me to tears." Jan doesn't recall what he did back then. But he likes the changes. "Always something happening, something to see." For a while, he had to find a new way to school every day because of the construction. "It was kind of cool," he says and sounds pleased to live in a city that plays tricks on him, that reshuffles its streets overnight like a stack of cards.

Christoph and Jan both like to go over into the western half. They like to shop on Kurfürstendamm, where the stores are close together. Do they ever feel out of place on Kurfürstendamm? Do people strike them as different? They think about this for a second, then Jan shakes his head. "No, can't say I've noticed that." Christoph bounces the ball once. He looks ready to return to the game. "Here's how I see it," he says. "I know some really stupid Westerners. But I also know some really stupid Easterners. I don't see the big difference." Then he bounces the ball again and turns to Jan. "You ready?" "Sure." We say good-bye. I see Jan make the first kick, sending the ball high across the benches. Christoph has been ready for a while, watching the ball come towards him, his lanky body curved like a bow.

In principle, every second Berliner can imagine moving to the other half of the city: 46% of West Berliners and 56% of East Berliners. In reality, only two percent of West and East Berliners have made the move so far.

On my last day I borrow a car from a friend. I drive in a southeasterly direction, rolling through Mitte, Treptow, and Schöneeweide. When I reach Köpenick, I take a wrong turn and end up in a maze of narrow streets. For a while I travel in circles, until I find a way to reconnect to my original route. Trams are still running in this part of the city. Their overhead wires stretch above like a gossamer roof. Once I have passed Müggelheim, I start looking for a small asphalt road on my right. According to the article I found in the newspaper two days ago, the road should link up to a short trail, which in turn should lead me to a clearing in the woods. And in that clearing I should find a hill—two meters high and forty meters long—under which Lenin lies buried. These are not the remains of the real man, but those of his granite counterpart, a 19-meter-high statue that used to raise its fist in the eastern neighborhood of Friedrichshain.

After another five minutes of driving through pine forest I find the asphalt road and follow it to the trailhead. There is a large ranger station at the start of the trail, and I stop to ask for directions. The station sits behind a high fence, which has several “Beware of Dog” signs attached to it. I walk up to the gate, find the doorbell, and wait for someone to come out. A door opens and the first one to appear is an Irish Setter who trots to the gate at a leisurely pace, sits down, and watches me. Next is a man in his forties with dark hair and a mustache. He too seems in no hurry to make it to the gate, and I worry that I may have woken him from a slumber, which wouldn’t help his mood. “Yes?” the man asks as he steps next to the dog. “I’m sorry to disturb you,” I say. “I was just wondering whether this trail might take me to the clearing in which the Lenin statue lies buried?” The man doesn’t answer right away. Instead he bends down to the dog and pats it. “The Lenin statue? Yes, that’s down there, about four hundred meters from here.” He doesn’t sound particularly annoyed, and I try another question. “Were you here when they brought the statue? I mean did you see them deliver it?” He nods. “It arrived in the evening, loaded onto several trucks. They had cut it up into 125 pieces, all neatly numbered. Since then we’ve had a few people sneak out there, trying to dig it up with shovels. But the pieces are way too heavy for that.” I thank him for his help, and he turns back to the house. I start down the trail.

The clearing turns out to be a small valley, criss-crossed by sandy hills. Much of the ground is covered by knee-high grass, and right away I know that I won’t be able to tell where the statue lies. The hills look too similar, their dimensions hard to gauge under open sky. I climb two or three of them

and dig up some of the sand with my heel, but no granite finger or eyebrow comes to the surface. I would like to know how deeply those 125 pieces lie buried, whether a rainy summer could wash them back into visibility. And I also would like to know whether the pieces are arranged in order, still suggesting the shape of a man. Maybe the city workers unloaded the pieces at random, a foot next to a chin, a knee above a shoulder, a head below a neck—a puzzle of granite anatomy left for someone else to figure out.

From the hill I stand on, I can overlook the entire clearing. A slight breeze has sprung up and bends the grass in front of me. I can hear the breeze moving through the branches of the nearby pines, and for a moment I think it is the only noise. But then I hear the faint traces of traffic coming out of the northwest, the stop and go of engines climbing through gears.